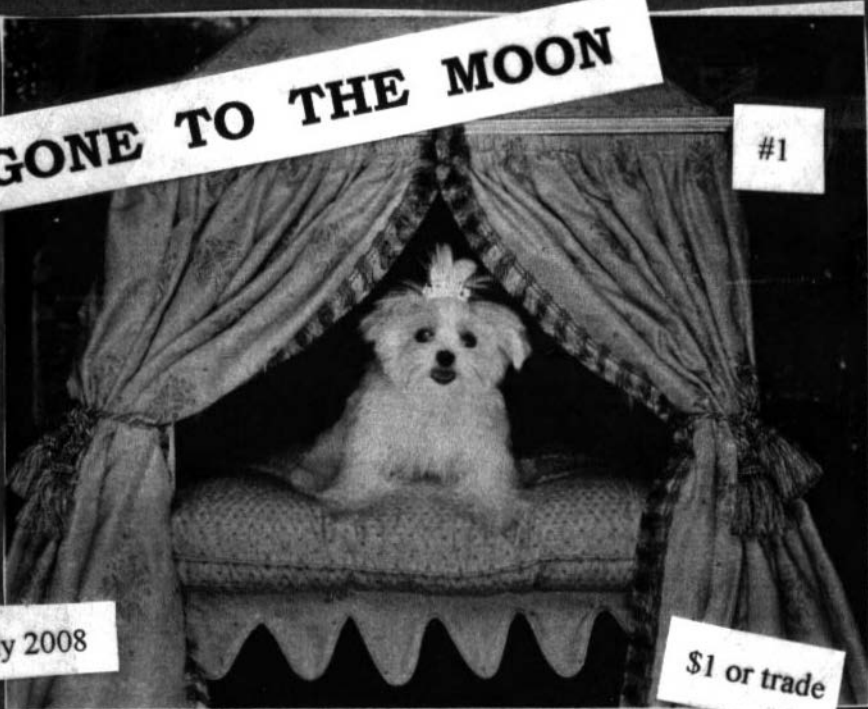


GONE TO THE MOON

#1

July 2008

\$1 or trade



Greetings, friends!

Welcome to the first issue of *Gone to the Moon*, named after one of my favorite Fastbacks songs. If you don't know who the Fastbacks are, you should. This is my first attempt at putting out a zine in six years. It is an experiment. And hopefully a successful one. Since this is an experiment, I've made this issue pretty short. It just gives you less of an excuse to not read the whole thing.

I love feedback and dialogue, so feel free to get in touch with me. I hope to be getting a PO Box soon, so for now email will have to do. If you'd like to trade zines or send me snail mail, just ask me for my address. Thanks for reading!

XOXO ---

You can reach me here: dictatortots@hotmail.com

John

**The only time I have ever been happy to see
an HRC logo**

As we get closer, the fence posts seem to multiply – lining the tops of the grassy hills that surround the city, weaving in and out of sight as we snake along the highway. They look just like the ones in the pictures. *I wonder if this is where it happened.* We take the first exit into town and make our way to the downtown area. We want to visit the memorial, but don't know how to find it. We find this hip looking coffee shop and ask the girls behind the counter if they know where it is. They seem uncomfortable with the question, and don't know the answer anyway. We slowly realize that this topic is still sensitive in this quiet college town. I notice an older man sitting in the corner reading the newspaper. He has gray hair



and is wearing khaki shorts, a polo shirt, and a HRC baseball cap. *Should I ask him?* Yes, I decide. I walk up to him and crouch by his table. *Excuse me sir, can I ask you a question?* Sure, he says. *I was wondering if you knew where the Matthew Shepard memorial was.* Actually, he informs me, there is no memorial. It was taken down years ago. And the scene of the murder is not accessible to the public. He is a little reluctant to answer my questions at first, then asks me if I'm gay. I respond affirmatively and he says *You noticed my hat, didn't you?*

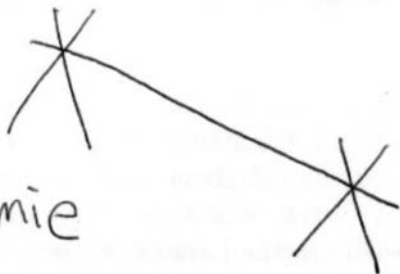




His name is Bob. He's a retired University of Wyoming professor who has lived in Laramie for about 30 years. We chat over coffee and he tells me all about queer life in this small town and what it was like when Matthew was killed. He talks about being interviewed for The Laramie Project. I try to place which person he was in the script. He tells me that it's still difficult being openly queer in Laramie, and that there is virtually no community of older queers. It's mostly just college students. He has all sorts of questions about me and Cesar and Chicago and my family and art school and I forget what else. He reminds me why I love talking to older gays. You get such a different perspective on things. He still



Welcome
to Laramie



whispers when he says “gay” or “boyfriend” when he’s asking me questions – kind of like the way one of my sisters distorts her voice into a soft muted tone when she says things like “prostitute”. Bob wants to know if Chicago is gay-friendly and if my parents still talk to me. He speaks as if he has been sitting in that coffee shop

all his life, waiting for someone to come along and talk to him. He has so many stories to tell, I wonder if he has the opportunity to tell them to anyone else. He seems lonely. I ask him if he has ever thought about moving to a bigger city. He says *I'm too old to start over somewhere else. This is home.* Bob is like the gay grandpa I never had. As we part, he shakes my hand, then pulls me in for a hug. When our embrace ends, I notice he is teary eyed. *Thank you for stopping to talk to me* he says. I get teary-eyed too. I give him one last wave before I turn to walk out the door. I round the corner and there is the bar where Matthew met his killers, right where Bob said it would be.

It is these temporary bonds – these unforeseen connections that strangers can make with each other - it is moments like these that I live for.

Exhibitionism vs. Cruising

I'm in the thrift store near my house, looking for a pair of overalls. They used to have an overalls section at this thrift store, but it looks like they've changed things around since last time I was here. So I go upstairs to look at the bags instead. A man runs by and bumps into me. I look up and he apologizes, so I smile and nod and he walks away as fast as he appeared. I go to the next aisle and he walks by again, but this time going the other direction. He is walking really fast and looks kind of frantic, like he's looking for a lost child or something. Maybe he's tweaking, I'm not sure. I can't help but keep looking at him every time he walks by. This time, he doesn't keep walking. Instead he comes down my aisle *again* and pretends to look at bags next to me. Now I'm on guard, thinking *he is either cruising me or he is going to kick my ass*. Then out of the corner of my eye I can see that he has stopped and is just standing there staring at me. I turn to look at him and when I look up, I see that this guy's got his dick whipped out (and I can't help but say it is H-U-G-E) and he is jacking off right there in the bag aisle at the thrift store, staring at me and murmuring things under his breath. I

can feel my eyes get wide and I turn around and run back downstairs to find Beka to tell her what just happened. As I'm running down the stairs I'm thinking *WHY am I running down the stairs? What just happened?* I can't tell whether this guy was cruising or just being creepy, hence my impulsive reaction. What if

he was trying to cruise and just wasn't that smooth? Maybe he thought *I'll just show him my dick and he'll get the idea*. But in the middle of a store with other people a few feet away from us? So that leads me to think that he is one of those creeps that gets off on flashing unexpected passerbyers or that jacks off at people on the subway under a newspaper. Which, if so, means that other people in the store could be his next target.

When I tell Beka what happened, she freaks out and thinks we should tell store security. But that doesn't sound like a good idea. First of all, I'm stoned and the last thing I want to do is talk to security or police – not like I would want to talk to the police anyway. Second, I am still confused about what happened. If he is just someone looking for hot-thrift-store-bathroom-sex, the last thing I want to do is participate in the demonization or criminalization of that. But here's the thing: while I'm all for public sex, consent is still a must! That is the difference (or at least one of the differences) between exhibitionism and cruising. Whipping it out at someone who hasn't reciprocated any signs of sexual interest is totally violating. And I guess feeling violated is partly why I reacted the way I did.

Still utterly confused, Beka and I walk around the store on the lookout for the guy. Every time we round a corner, Beka has her fist ready and held out in front of her in case this guy (or his dick) pops out at us. We stay close to each other and after a quick check of every aisle and every corner we conclude that he left already. After I raid the CD bin and find a few gems, we decide to leave too.

And all I wanted were some overalls.

Check one:

- ☐ White (Non-Hispanic)
- ☐ Latino/Hispanic
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Confused

Salvadoran culture has never had a large presence in my life. The closest connection I had to that part of my heritage growing up was the Fernando Llorca beach towels my grandma would bring back from her trips to El Salvador or the occasional family dinner at the local pupuseria. My dad speaks Spanish, but rarely, and sure didn't

pass it on to me and my sisters. It wasn't until I was in high school that I even began to acknowledge that I was Salvadoran. This acknowledgement quickly turned into an identity crisis. There was a very short period in my early teens where I went a bit overboard with latino pride, and not in a good way. I would check the "latino/hispanic" box on standardized tests and try to distance myself from my whiteness as much as possible. In retrospect, this was embarrassing to say the least, and offensive more than anything else. I have two specific memories of this illusion being shattered. My freshman year of high school I played drums in a punk band. The other people in the band had been friends for a long time, and had been playing with another drummer previously. In a conversation with one of my bandmates, he mentioned how the original goal of the band was to be an all-latino band, but they only seemed to find white drummers. I responded with something to the effect of, "What, am I not latino enough for you?" He thought I was joking. When he realized I wasn't joking is when I realized that I needed a reality check – and I needed it fast. That reality check came soon after when I was filling out a

demographics form for some GSA thing and one of the options in the "race/ethnicity" section was "mixed-race". Faced yet again with this dilemma, I asked my sister if we were mixed-race. She sternly said no and explained to me the difference between race and ethnicity. While we were Salvadoran, as well as various European ethnicities, we were still white. She said I couldn't go around claiming to be a person of color when I, as well as my family, were white (or at least passing) and benefiting from white privilege everyday. That was actually one of the first times I had a really solid grasp of what white privilege was. This was also the end of my identity crisis.



I've often wondered why Salvadoran culture was so absent from my upbringing (but then again, so was Italian and French culture, except for the Sicilian street slang my other grandma used to teach us. And I can't even remember the last thing I am half of the time. Oh, right, Danish. I'm also Danish). Anyway, I think it mostly lays in the fact that my grandma has had a rocky relationship with my mother since day one and their conflict affected the relationships me and my sisters had with my grandma. My grandma was always kept at a certain distance from us growing up, emotionally and physically. For a long time I was resentful of that fact that I was put in the middle of their conflict. But it is getting better now, and as a result I find myself growing closer to my grandma in her old



age. And in our growing relationship, I find it easier to ask her questions about her family history, her life, various traditions, and immigrating to the US, among other things. I also realized she will not be alive forever, and if I really want to amend our relationship, I have to do it sooner rather than later.



Another reason for the lack of Salvadoran presence in my family is a result of the violent process of cultural erasure also known as assimilation. Whether intentionally or not, my grandma "became white" when she immigrated to the US. Her family was already of the Salvadoran upper-class, fair-skinned and wealthier than most. When she married my working-class Okie grandfather (a term I wouldn't have known if it weren't for the brilliant Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz), she basically married into whiteness. Not that she was stripped of or abandoned her cultural, ethnic, or national identity, but she suddenly passed as white and was granted the privileges that come along with whiteness in the US. It obviously wasn't that easy either, and not that cut and dry. I've heard the stories of how she tried to lose her accent (which she has not done in the 60+ years she has been in the US) and the discrimination she received (and still does) because of it.

But this process of assimilation had a trickle-down effect in my family, getting more and more intense with each generation, and continues to this day. Our cultural backgrounds and traditions (Salvadoran, Italian, or other) were not celebrated or practiced when I was a kid, nor are they today. I think that's why I get so sad when I think of my sister's kids – who are half-Mexican and half-everything I am – not being raised bilingual and already at the age of 4 denying that they're Mexican. To see that in a child is so disconcerting - as if my niece already knows that she can fit in with her white suburban peers better or will be granted some kind of reward for speaking English and passing as white. Assimilation is already such a dominant force in the US, I feel like every effort at retaining some kind of cultural identity that is not straight-white-Eurocentric-Christian-male-capitalist centered is not only important, but necessary.

As part of the larger goal of learning about my family history (on all sides), and with my grandma being my only living grandparent left, I have begun to attempt to build a connection to Salvadoran culture both through my grandma as well as independently from her. I try to do this genuinely and cautiously, so I don't act like your average whitey who feels like they have no culture so they "learn about" other peoples' and co-opt them for their own benefit. While I still feel like that sometimes, I have to remind myself that

my situation isn't totally like that, that it *is* part of my family history. Also now, unlike my high school self, I am much more aware of the privilege and whiteness that I inhabit, and that effects how I approach this whole "finding my roots" process. I am not interested in claiming something that is not mine or representing something I should not. I am more interested in learning about where I come from and how I got here, no matter how ugly or beautiful that history may be. I want to hold on to that and pass it on to future generations in my family so that our stories and identities won't be erased from history as they so frequently are. And in this attempt at reversing the process of assimilation and reclaiming my cultural heritage as an adult, maybe I can find the slightest possibility of making some kind of change in this fucked up world in which we live, even if it is only me that changes.

